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AUTHOR Skehan, Peter
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ABSTRACT

A British longitudinal study of language acquisition was followed up for further information on the relationship between language acquisition, language aptitude, and second language learning. One of the original cohorts (n=23), now in secondary school, was originally studied for native language learning achievement and was now being studied for foreign language aptitude and foreign language achievement with a variety of indices. It was found that the structural/syntactic first-language measures often had significant correlations with second language aptitude, the test-based measures of first-language development were most predictive, there were strong relationships between subjects' family background and aptitude, and structural correlations between first-language development and language aptitude did not necessarily extend to second-language achievement but varied significantly in their correlations. Conclusions and implications for aptitude testing are discussed. A 24-item bibliography is included. (MSE)

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9. Where does language aptitude come from?

PETER SKEHAN

Institute of Education, London University.

INTRODUCTION

At the 1983 BAAL Seminar Gordon Wells spoke on the Bristol Language Project and gave an overview of the findings obtained up to that time (Wells 1984). He reported that the longitudinal study of the first language development of the 125 children involved had revealed great systematicity in the order in which various language systems and sub-systems are acquired, thus validating the earlier but considerably smaller scale findings of Brown (1973). In addition, he drew attention to the sorts of language environment associated with faster progress in language development, indicating that mothers who extend the conversational topics and meanings nominated by their children seem to be doing something that is of great importance for language development. Accepting the interests of the child and using them as a starting point therefore seems to be a significant influence on subsequent language development. Wells also mentioned that the Bristol results suggest that there is fine-tuning of input to children but that in currently poorly understood ways this fine-tuning is influenced by the child, so that rather than mothers adjusting input to their children autonomously, they allow themselves to be guided by the cues that are provided by the child. For example, clear relationships could be seen between input frequency of various aspects of the auxiliary system and the point at which the child acquired the auxiliary concerned, with the auxiliary in question being produced by the mother at an increasing rate as the point of acquisition was approached, and reducing in frequency shortly after the auxiliary had reached a criterion level of acquisition.

Fascinating and vital as these findings are for second and foreign language learning, they are not the main emphasis of the current paper. Yet another aspect of the Bristol study is the starting point for the research to be reported here. Wells (1985) describes the variation observable in the children's language development at the age of 42 months in the following way:

> 'we find that children scoring as high as 2 Standard Deviations above the mean have the mean of the sample as a whole at the time of the last observation of the older children (18 months later), while those scoring as low as 2 Standard deviations below the mean have a score equivalent

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to the mean observed for the sample as a whole as much as 15 months earlier.' (p124)

This is an astonishing amount of variation and suggests that there are very wide individual differences in the speed at which language is acquired. Since it is now increasingly recognised that there are individual differences in first language performance that persist into adulthood (e.g. Fillmore, Wang, and Kempler 1979), the existence of such wide differences in rate of first language development raises the possibility that there may be a connection between them and the differences in pattern of subsequent language ability.

1 A FOLLOW-UP TO THE BRISTOL STUDY: GENERAL OUTLINE

The chidren who were originally studied by the Bristol researchers are now between 13 and 16 years of age, and are now mainly distributed amongst secondary schools in the Bristol area. Such a situation suggested the possibility of the continued monitoring of the performance of these children to see if the data available on their first language development might have any relationship to them now as foreign language learners of French or German. In particular, it raises the possibility of a connection between first language development, on the one hand, and both foreign language aptitude and foreign language achievement, on the other.

The first of these relationships, language development and foreign language aptitude, may perhaps be less obvious in relevance. Language aptitude was studied fairly intensively during the 1950's and 1960's by Carroll (Carroll and Sapon 1957, Carroll 1965) and Pimsleur (1966), who each produced test batteries designed to assess such a set of abilities, and who each conceptualised aptitude as multi-dimensional. In recent years, however, the study of aptitude has languished somewhat, with the concept often being considered a sub-section of verbal intelligence, or the product of previous training, or inappropriate given the current emphasis on communicative language teaching and acquisition-oriented approaches.

In fact, there is evidence to rebut each of these points. Carroll (1965), Gardner and Lambert (1972), and Skehan (1982) have shown that aptitude is separable from verbal intelligence. Carroll (1979), and Politzer and Weiss (1970) have shown that aptitude is not particularly trainable. Finally, Skehan (1982) has shown how aptitude can still be a potent predictor even when there is a more communicative orientation to teaching, and Reves (1982) has demonstrated that the concept of aptitude is a first-rank predictor in acquisition as well as instructed situations. There may be

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scope, as Gardner has indicated, for analysis of aptitude to take account of changes in language teaching methods. However, the concept of a generalised set of abilities relevant to language learning is still as relevant as ever, so that it is at least important to use the measures we have available, since it is clear that they will play an important role in any enlarged review of the place of aptitude.

The existence of the Bristol project allows the possibility, for the first time, of studying the origin of aptitude. Carroll (1973) speculated that foreign language aptitude is the residue of first language learning ability which atrophies at different rates with different people. The wealth of first language data on the Bristol sample makes it possible to investigate whether children who are rapid learners of their first language are also those who appear gifted for foreign language study. In addition, the range of data gathered by the Bristol team makes it possible to look for relationships between the PATTERNING of first language development and the PATTERNING of foreign language aptitude.

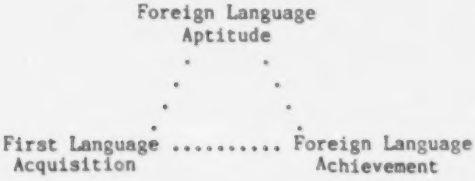
The second relationship mentioned above is more direct. Many of the children concerned are now studying modern languages in Bristol secondary schools, and this allows us to investigate the actual relationship between first and foreign language learning, independent of the possible mediating role of foreign language aptitude. One can simply ask whether rapid first language learners do well in conventional foreign language classrooms, and whether the capacities involved in the former activity are enduring and relevant to the latter.

The two relationships are shown in Figure One. In addition, the triangle of relationships includes that between foreign language aptitude and foreign language achievement. This is a well-investigated area, included here simply for completeness.

Figure One implies primarily the study of the relationship between indices of first language development, foreign language aptitude, and foreign language achievement. However, the main emphasis of this paper will be not so much to study the simple first-order correlations between the classes of variables involved, but to try and invesigate how predictable foreign language aptitude and achievement are through the various indices of first language development. The present investigation will therefore try to establish which categories of first language development contribute most to foreign language aptitude and achievement, and to examine whether the more language based variables are more salient than those which are more related family background indices. Consequently, the present study will largely draw on regression analysis as a technique to investigate the relative contributions of the different variable types. For a more detailed study of the

FIGURE ONE

The Triangle of Relationships.



basic correlations relationships involved the reader is referred to Skehan (in press).

2 THE VARIABLES INVOLVED

The three groups of variables shown in Figure One were assessed by a variety of measures, which are described below.

a) Indices of first language development: These indices were produced by the Bristol team, and were already available on computer files. The main indices used were:

1 Global measures of rate of development (MLU, Bristol Scale Level).
2 Specific measures of rate of development (range of language functions used; development of modification; complexity of noun phrases used.)
3 Test-based measures of comprehension and vocabulary size.
4 Demographic/Biographical indices of family circumstances (class of family background, parental occupations, etc).
5 Measures of the quantity and type of speech and literacy-based activities the children were exposed to.

The first two sets of measures were derived from the spontaneous language recorded in the home by the Bristol Research team. Two cohorts of children were studied by the Bristol team, the older (N=64) born in the year 1969-1970, and the younger (N=61) born in 1971-1972. The cohorts were studied for slightly overlapping time periods, so that a picture of language development was obtained from the ages of 15 months to 60 months, with the older cohort being studied for the age range 39-60 months, and the younger for 15-42 months. The data in this paper will be on the older cohort since the data analysis for this group is at a more advanced stage. The third set of measures was obtained from tests given to the children at around 39 months, and also at 57 and 66 months. The demographic measures were drawn from interview and background data, while the fifth set of measures were based partly on tape-recorded information and partly on interview data.

b) Indices of foreign language aptitude: Carroll (1965) has proposed the following components for aptitude: Inductive Language Learning Ability; Grammatical Sensitivity; Phonemic Coding Ability; and Rote Learning Ability for Foreign Language Materials. Because only limited access to the children was possible, a set of aptitude sub-tests was selected which would be easy to obtain and use, and also relatively brief to administer, i.e. the tests could be completed in a two-hour testing session. Within these constraints, the test battery so assembled was thought to sample the sub-components of aptitude as comprehensively possible. The tests used were:

AH2:	a verbal intelligence test	(Heim 1970)
EMLAT1:	Hidden Words	(Carroll and
EMLAT2:	Matching Words	Sapon 1967)
York Language Aptitude Test		(Green 1975)
PLAB5:	Sound Discrimination	(Pimsleur 1966)
PLAB6:	Sound-Symbol Association	(Pimsleur 1966)

The AH2 was chosen as a 'marker' test for general verbal intelligence. The first test taken from the Elementary Modern Languages Aptitude Test, Hidden Words, requires the candidate to use a misspelled version of a word as a basis for guessing what the original word was. It is postulated that this is done on the basis of native language vocabulary and also phonemic coding ability. The second EMLAT test, Matching Words, requires the candidate to find the word (from five possibilities) in a second sentence which fulfils the same grammatical function as a particular word in a first sentence. The test attempts to measure Carroll's grammatical sensitivity factor. The York test tests the pupil's ability to produce forms in an unknown language (Swedish) on the analogy of the forms presented; it is, in other words, a test of inductive language learning ability. Finally the two Pimsleur tests assess auditory ability, with PLAB5 focussing on sound discrimination in context, and PLAB6 on the candidate's ability to relate sound to symbol.

c) Indices of foreign language achievement: As with the language aptitude measures it was necessary to find easily available assessment instruments. After an examination of a range of possible measures, it was decided to use the NFER/APU tests for both French and German (Dickson, Boyce, Lee, Portal, and Smith 1985). Separate tests are available for Speaking, Listening, Writing and Reading. The tests have a communicative orientation, are aimed at students comparable to those involved in the study, and have attested high reliability.

TABLE ONE

Language Aptitude - Foreign Language Achievement Correlations

	AH2	EMLAT1	EMLAT2	YORK	PLAB5	PLAB6
Listening	.55	.49	.66	.68	.07	.49
Speaking	.59	.55	.66	.68	.10	.33
Reading	.58	.73	.67	.65	.16	.50
Writing	.68	.64	.69	.74	.17	.48

N = 23 : Significance Levels .05 = .41

3 **THE BASIC RELATIONSHIPS: First Language, Aptitude, Foreign Language Achievement**

This section briefly reports the first-order correlations for the relationships shown in Figure One. (For more extensive discussion, see Skehan (in press)). As mentioned earlier, they are for the older cohort only. In addition, it must be pointed out that while for the First Language/Aptitude correlations N = 53, for the correlations involving Foreign Language Achievement N = 23. This is the result of the children involved having reached the age at which it is possible to drop the study of a foreign language, either from personal choice or because of advice from the school concerned. Whatever the reason, one should also take account of the probability that the children still studying French at the age of fifteen or so are not completely representative of the original sample, since they are more likely to have shown previous success in language study and have been encouraged to continue the study of a foreign language.

The relationships between foreign language aptitude and foreign language achievement are shown in Table One.

There is little to be said about these correlations. They duplicate many others that have been obtained for the aptitude-achievement relationship, and are the least original of the present study. The only point worth making is that by the standards of such correlations these are uniformly high, (except for those with PLAB5), suggesting that the aptitude tests concerned are, strongly related to and very predictive of foreign language achievement.

More interesting are the correlations between first language development and foreign language aptitude. These are shown in Table Two.

Some general points need to be made to highlight the relationships

TABLE TWO

First Language - Foreign Language Aptitude Correlations

	AH2	EMLAT1	EMLAT2	YORK	PLAB5	PLAB6
Family Background	.59**	.37**	.55**	.56**	.19	.33**
Parental interest in literacy	.37**	.34**	.46**	.36**	.20	.16
Qt child read to	.55**	.31*	.46**	.51**	.20	.16
Total Parental Education	.48**	.29*	.48**	.41**	.08	.29*
MLUs 42 mths	.31*	.32*	.52**	.35**	.12	.39**
Comprehension 39mths	.30*	.34**	.45**	.34**	.28*	.48**
EPTV(Vocab. Test) 39 mths	.54**	.45**	.48**	.50**	.32*	.28*
Range of language functions	.00	.05	.09	-.04	.09	.06
Range of sentence meanings	.35**	.30*	.29*	.09	.19	.04
Range of adjectives and determiners	.43**	.30*	.44**	.25*	.00	.31*
Range of modality, aspect+time markers	.17	.21	.40**	.24*	.16	.27*
MLUs 57 mths	.23	.30*	.15	.05	-.14	-.03
Comprehension 57 mths	.36**	.23	.51**	.43**	.27*	.27*
EPVT (Vocabulary test) 66 mths	.33**	.36**	.21	.37**	.11	.18
Range of syntactic complexity	.15	.20	.28*	.04	.23	.20
Range of nominal phrase complexity	.36**	.39**	.43**	.26*	.19	.31*
Bristol Scale 42mths	.32*	.26*	.34**	.29*	.16	.42**
Bristol Scale 57mths	.33**	.31*	.38**	.17	.48**	.11

N = 53 Significance Levels : .05 = .24
.01 = .33

TABLE 3

First Language - Foreign Language Achievement Correlations

	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
Family Background	.43*	.57*	.47*	.47*
Parental interest in literacy	.23	.35	.38	.24
Qt child read to	.19	.37	.18	.21
Total Parental Education	.24	.43*	.34	.32
MLUs 42 mths	.19	.20	.18	.13
Comprehension 39mths	.57**	.45*	.48*	.42*
EPTV(Vocab. Test) 39 mths	.29	.21	.33	.31
Range of language Functions	-.25	-.17	-.14	-.20
Range of sentence Meanings	-.09	-.22	-.10	-.20
Range of adjectives and determiners	-.07	-.22	-.11	-.08
Range of modality, aspect+time markers	.36	.24	.39	.26
MMLUs 57 mths	-.17	-.13	-.02	-.08
Comprehension 57 mths	.49*	.49*	.55**	.46*
EPVT (Vocabulary test) 66 mths	.67**	.48*	.57**	.52*
Range of syntactic complexity	.00	.04	.04	-.05
Range of nominal phrase complexity	.16	.22	.25	.21
Bristol Scale 42mths	.04	.02	.03	.05
Bristol Scale 57mths	.00	.10	.05	.06

N = 23: Significance Levels .05 = .41
.01 = .53

shown in the table. First, the more stuctural / syntactic first language measures often have significant correlations with aptitude, sometimes at quite a high level. The MLUs measure taken at 42 months, the Range of Adjectives and Determiners, and the Range of Nominal Phrase Complexity, for example, have significant correlations with the non-auditory aptitude measures, reaching a high of .52 with MLUs42 months and EMLAT2 - a remarkable result when one considers that there is a time interval of roughly ten years between the two measures.

Second, the test-based measures of first language development (comprehension and vocabulary taken at both 39 months and at 57/66 months) are the most impressive predictors of all, with some correlations above 0.4 and even 0.5 (EPVT39 and York at 0.50; Comprehension57 and EMLAT2 at 0.51). One wonders here whether comprehension and vocabulary growth are the best indicators of subsequent language development, or whether, alternatively, the strength of relationship may be partly dependent on the fact that one is dealing, in each case, with test performance. Further research will be conducted to clarify this point.

Third, there are strong relationships between family background indices and subsequent aptitude. This raises the possibility that factors like the quantity the child is read to, the education of the parents, and the literacy orientation of the home may be important components in the development of aptitude.

Finally, in terms of the basic correlational relationships involved, involved,there is the data shown in Table Three relating the first language indices to foreign language development. The data are an interesting contrast to those shown in Table Two. First of all, it is clear that the structural indices which related first language development to aptitude do not associate with foreign language achievement. MLUs, for example, yields correlations of 0.19, 0.20, 0.18,and 0.13, none of which approaches significance. In contrast, the comprehension and vocabulary measures seem even more important, producing an even higher prevailing level of correlation, with 12 of the 16 correlation coefficients involved in excess of .40, and reaching statistical significance. Finally, the family background indices also produce some significant correlations, with the index of family background itself producing four significant correlations and the total parental education index correlating significantly with the APU Speaking Test. The implication of these results is certainly that we need a more differentiated view of the first language indices grouped together in Figure 1.

4. PREDICTING APTITUDE AND ACHIEVEMENT

The examination of the simple correlations in the previous

section has been very suggestive of the patterns of relationship between first language development, foreign language aptitude, and foreign language achievement. However, the correlations have been considered essentially singly. As a result , overlaps in influence between the various indices have not been examined properly with the result that it is difficult to assess the relative importance of the different classes of predictor involved, and the extent to which the various measures simply duplicate one another. To address these issues, a series of regression analyses were run to try to take preliminary steps towards the identification of the path of causation linking the different variables. First of all, the achievement measures were predicted using all the potential variables from both first language development as well as language aptitude. Then, regression analyses were run taking the language aptitude measures as the dependent variable and using the various first language measures as the independent influences. Because of limitations of space, only selected regression results will be reported here, but those that are shown are representative of those obtained by examining the patterns of relationship with all the potential dependent variables.

The regression tables using the APU/NFER Listening and Speaking tests as dependent variables and all the aptitude and first language measures as independent variables are shown as Table Four and Table Five. The first impression that one gets from these tables is that high levels of prediction are quickly obtained, accounting for a very high proportion of the variance (i.e. nearly 70%). It is, however, almost certain that cross-validation of these results with larger sample sizes would lead to considerable shrinkage in the value of the coefficients obtained, so that one can be fairly sure that considerable over-estimation of the relationships is taking place and that one ought to scale down these values considerably to take account of the way in which the analysis has capitalised upon the quirks of error variance. Even so, it still seems likely that high levels of relationship are involved, so that the regression analyses do need to be taken seriously.

It is also striking that it is the aptitude tests which exert the more powerful influence on these tables. In particular, the York test and the EMLAT account for most of the success at foreign language learning, and are then supplemented by some first language test-based measures of vocabulary growth and comprehension. It would seem, therefore, that the aptitude tests have 'captured' the useful predictive variance of many of the first language indices (see below for predictions of the aptitude tests themselves) and so preempt them for inclusion in the regression equations. The one type of first language measure for which this

TABLE 4

Regression on listening: all variables

Test	Multiple R	R
York Language Analysis	.68	.46
EPVT(66mths): Vocabulary	.80	.64
EMLAT2: Hidden Words	.83	.69

TABLE 5

Regression on speaking: all variables

Test	Multiple R	R
York Language Analysis	.68	.46
EMLAT 1: Spelling Clues	.75	.57
EPVT39mths (Vocab)	.79	.62
Comprehension Test:39mths	.81	.66

TABLE 6

Regression on York Language Analysis Test

Variable	Multiple R	R
Family Background	.56	.31
Total Parental Education	.61	.37
MLUs 42 months	.67	.44
Comprehension 57mths	.69	.47

TABLE 7

Regression on EMLAT1: Hidden Words

Variable	Multiple R	R
EPVT(Vocabulary) 39mths	.45	.21
Nominal Group Comlpexity	.52	.27
MLUs 42 months	.56	.31

shown draws on one of the test-based measures of comprehension or vocabulary given early in life. We must conclude, therefore, that either a test taking skill that is displayed very early in life, or alternatively, the development of lexical-comprehension skills are important in the development of the sorts of abilities measured by aptitude tests.

5. SOME SPECULATIONS ON THE ROLE OF APTITUDE IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

The discussion so far has been mainly in terms of the research results, and attempts at interpretation which go beyond the straightforward patterning of the results obtained have been avoided. In this final section the discussion will be much more wide ranging, using the reported data as the springboard for an interpretation of several strands of contemporary educational research which, it is hoped, will in turn shed light on the data which have been reported here.

It is proposed, broadly speaking, that aptitude predicts because it is an amalgam of important but fairly independent capacities implicated in learning. In particular, the aptitude tests which are based on more linguistic structure seem to draw upon two sets of abilities. First, they tap relevant linguistic skills and knowledge. Thus, it is important that aptitude tests like the York Language Analysis test and the (E)MLAT tests outperform tests of verbal intelligence in predicting language learning success. This is because there seems to be a facility for handling structure in linguistic material which enables some people to do better on these tests. Second, it is proposed, aptitude tests draw on skills in using decontextualised language. The evidence here is only indirect and circumstantial. Still, it enables us to make some sense of the correlational and regression results. It is clear that the aptitude tests are linked with class of family background. Recently, a number of researchers looking at the development of educationally relevant skills which are predictive of school success (Wells 1985; Tizard and Hughes 1984) have noted while there are few class linked differences in oral language ability, there are class linked differences in the development of the autonomous, disembedded use of language. Thus while class provides little basis for predicting differences in oral abilities, it is implicated in differences in ability to cope with literacy-linked activities, and the use of language as a tool to look in on itself, as it were.

It would seem extremely likely that the paper-and-pencil nature of the aptitude tests, together with their requirement that language is used in a decontextualised manner would advantage testees who are able to use language in a disembodied way, who see the point of what may seem to be rather remote out-of-context tasks. In other words, it is not social class, in itself, that leads to class of

family background entering the regression equations so frequently, but rather the social class correlate of familiarity and facility with decontextualised material which is relevant.

Language aptitude, as reflected in the structural aptitude tests, is therefore an effective, predictive hybrid of a fundamental ability with oral language coupled with an ability to handle language as a vehicle. The combination makes for powerful prediction, and allows aptitude tests like the York Language Analysis test to cut out most of the first language indices which might otherwise have entered the regression equations shown in Tables Four and Five.

The next question that needs to be addressed is how such decontextualised abilities become salient in foreign language classes. It seems that this may happen because it is important for the student in such a class to see the point of what is going on in order to bring relevant language skills into action. It would be different if language classes allowed students to use their oral language abilities naturally and meaningfully to talk about things which are important and familiar to them. It is more likely, however, that language classrooms appear remote to many students and that their language learning abilities are used through the filter of layers of decontextualisation.

Some more specific ways in which such influences operate may be seen from recent American research. Wong Fillmore (1985) has demonstrated from a large scale study of instruction for Limited English Proficiency students that a considerable proportion of the success that is experienced in such classroom is linked with factors which enable students to convert the input such classes provide into intake. Thus clear marking of boundaries between the sections of lessons, the familiarity of students with the organisational practices and routines of the classroom, fair and appropriate turn-allocation procedures, repetitiveness, attention to the differing needs of individual students all influence very strongly the degree of success that will be experienced in different classrooms.

In one sense, as Wong Fillmore notes, these are not particularly new features of the good classroom. However, we can say that if they have been demonstrated to correlate with success, the implication is that a significant number of classrooms lack them. This is very important for individual difference variables like aptitude. It is possible to consider good classrooms as those where instructional conditions are clear and do not disadvantage any particular type of student. In such cases, factors such as aptitude may be relatively unimportant. However, the crucial issue is what happens when instructional conditions are less than ideal. Here, it would seem, the onus is on the student to compensate for the lack

of clarity of instructional conditions, and it is highly likely that some students are able to cope with this problem better than others. Hence, if in the language class the problem is to convert input into intake with maximum efficiency, some students may be able to cope more effectively than others with the situation when boundaries between classroom events are not so clearly marked, when the classroom concerned does not have consistent organisational procedures and routines, when turn allocation is haphazard, unfair, and inappropriate, when there is insufficient built-in repetiveness for language use, and when individual student needs are not attended to sufficiently.

In other words, there are likely to be considerable individual differences in the way students cope with less than ideal instructional conditions, and in the way they make sense of, and see the relevance of, the decontextualised ritual that education often is. Here, it would appear, we need to take seriously that aptitude tests are capturing these capacities as well and that that is one of the reasons why they predict so well. Language aptitude tests not only tap relevant differences in linguistic ability; they also provide an index of 'classroom-wiseness'.

In fact, the analysis of the role of aptitude presented here may be generalised to other learning situations. It may also be the beginning of an explanation for the role of language aptitude in predicting success in different learning settings. Some writers, (e.g. Krashen 1981), have claimed that aptitude is limited in its importance to formal situations which connect with learning (as opposed to acquisition). The account provided here makes it clear that this is an over-simplification. The dual nature of aptitude - part residual linguistic ability and part index of the ability to handle decontextualised material - means that it cannot be dismissed so lightly.

The residual linguistic ability aspect of aptitude is likely to be important in all situations, since learning/acquiring language in the most natural of situations still requires language processing and analytical abilities. Indeed it can be argued that the cognitive organisers component of the Monitor Model is precisely this ability (Dulay, Burt, and Krashen 1982), and that individual differences in acquisition are dependent not only on the quality and quantity of input available, but also on the quality of the analysis of such input. This, of course, would imply individual differences in the operation of the Cognitive Organisers. So part of the reason why Reves (1982) finds aptitude to be the best general predictor in an acquisition situation (as well as a formal one) may be the result of differences in language processing abilities among her subjects.

However, the other component of operationalised language aptitude,

an ability to handle decontextualised language use, is likely to be no less important, and not simply in formal situations. It will be implicated to the extent that language learning is not bounded by personal experience. It will often be the case, in both communicative teaching as well as in acquisition situations, that learning will be facilitated to the extent that learners can make sense of the situation they are in. In so doing, they will benefit from their capacities to analyse, to use language as a tool to look in upon itself.

This may be made clearer by examining communicative language teaching, where it is very likely that decontextualisation abilities will be used. Consider, for example, the popular information gap activities that are now commonplace. It cannot be pretended that such activities are part of the ongoing lives of language learners. It is unlikely that such learners would ever normally assemble Lego windmills under instruction from someone sitting in a chair facing in the other direction. There is no context of ongoing life which enables the learners to draw upon shared experience to make sense of what is being said to them by near-strangers with whom they may be united only to the extent that they will both take an examination in the communicative use of English. Instead, the learners have to cope with the disembodied nature of the task and perceive its relevance to their future language learning. In so doing they may well be drawing on very much the sort of skills that are implicated in the decontextualised component of language aptitude tests, with the result that once again, aptitude test information may be the basis for prediction of success, even in non-formal teaching situations.

To sum up, then, two main points are being made about foreign language aptitude. First, such aptitude, as presently conceived, is a hybrid, combining both a language processing ability with the capacity to handle decontextualised material. Aptitude tests are effective predictors because both these component abilities are important for language learning success. Further, the origin of both types of ability can be traced to a relatively early period in life. Second, the analysis of aptitude presented here is general enough to be relevant not simply to formal learning situations, but also to more communicatively oriented classrooms as well as 'acquisition' settings. However, the results and speculations presented here are only a small beginning; further research should enable a more accurate and differentiated picture of aptitude to emerge and should make clearer the linkages between different components of first and foreign language learning ability.

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